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ABSTRACT

Reading instruction is on the verge of a shift to a new paradigm that will be based on a new understanding of cognitive processes and will include five important tenets: (1) the best way to promote the emergence of reading behavior is to use interesting story books; (2) the primary cause of reading problems is too much instruction, too much information, or premature information; (3) reading is not a subject but a natural behavior that will emerge if left to its own devices; (4) human beings are not blank slates that teachers can "write" reading on--reading must be nurtured; and (5) rather than starting with extrinsic meanings in print and trying to make the learner turn it into speech, teachers should be starting with intrinsic meanings in speech and turning them into print. This approach is commonly referred to as the "language experience approach," and is far more successful than the packaged reading programs from publishers or the regimented skills approach to instruction. The guiding principal of the new paradigm is that teachers must stop trying to "invoke" reading, and begin rather to "evoke" reading behavior. (HTH)

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THE EMERGENCE OF READING BEHAVIOR

by
William P. J. Costello

As our knowledge of the ways that the brain plays with language increase we draw ever-nearer to a revolution in Reading; a revolution very similar to the one that Copernicus began, when he postulated that the planets revolve around the sun, since we too will view a universe from a totally new perspective. In The Aquarian Conspiracy Marilyn Ferguson sets the tone for the revolution: "It is high time we freed ourselves of attachments to old forms and eased the flight of the unfettered human mind." (1) We are on the verge of a shift to a New Paradigm in Reading, not just a new modification of the Old Paradigm. In short, we will soon give up trying to attach better wings to caterpillars and just let the butterflies emerge.

This New Paradigm for Reading will be based on our new understandings about how the brain works, and how it plays with language and will include the following five tenets:

1. The best way to promote the emergence of reading behavior is to "do" reading.

Dewey emphasized the active engagement of the learner, and Smith offers the apparently paradoxical precept, 'the only way to learn to read is to read.' (2) And there are ways to get the learner's mind

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into direct contact with the language, and to let the unfettered mind engage it and play with it. But we must first clear away the two major obstacles to this natural process: direct instruction by Reading teachers, and Reading programs produced by publishers. Of course the New Paradigm will keep those teachers who are willing to play a new role, as well as printed materials that are not part of a Reading program; books that tell stories that are interesting to individual learners, or which provide information that aids a curious mind on a search. But teachers will cease teaching Reading lessons in groups and eschew Reading programs that are "canned" by publishing houses to be "crammed" into learners. And with that done, we will be ready to allow the mind the freedom to play with the language. Then, here are some things that will naturally follow:

- We will start with the meaning inside the learner expressed in his language. We will write it down and let him read it back, and we'll simply tell him the few words he cannot read.

- We will read to the learner from something that he chooses, because we know that reading is a process of predicting meaning, and that hearing the flow and rhythms of written language aloud will help the learner when he reads print silently.

- We will use simple activities to help the learner to bring to consciousness unconscious knowings of orthographic and syntactic patterns. (See below for specific activities.)

2. The primary cause of reading problems is too much instruction.

Consider the Reading universe to be divided into two areas: the Readers and the Non-Readers. The Old Paradigm explained the universe thusly: Readers are people who responded well to good instruction and good materials, and Non-Readers are those who did not. (A classic case of "good medicine, bad patients.") The New Paradigm views the same universe from a new perspective and defines Readers as people who learned to read quite effortlessly, almost automatically, and who can rarely remember how or when the learned to read, but frequently remember 'just suddently reading.' -- in many cases in spite of too much direct instruction. The "Non-Readers would be subdivided into two groups: those who cannot read due to a specifically identifiable cause (e.g. neurological, physiological, emotional, etc.), and those who were systematically retarded by too much instruction. The latter group, the "over-instructed," represent the overwhelming majority of "Non-Readers' (perhaps as much as 95%) and were the victims of too much information (over instruction), misinformation (e.g. phonics rules),

or premature information (i.e. information inappropriate to their developmental stage). Indeed, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. . ." (3)

3. Reading is not a subject, but a natural behavior that will emerge.

Although it is convenient for publishers and educators, education's counterpart of the "military-industrial complex," to assume that reading is a subject that can be neatly divided into a measurable sequence of uniform steps, and that learning to read is simply a matter of climbing that curricular staircase, it is simply not the way that we perversely unpredictable creatures become readers.

On the basis of personal observation of hundreds of tutors, personal classroom experience at almost all levels, and voluminious anecdotal information related to me by many teachers, I maintain that reading behavior naturally emerges in a pattern that I refer to as the "Perception, Recognition, Insight Curve," (4) which is just like a fast breaking curve in baseball. This phenomenon occurs when the learning-reader appears to be making little or no progress over an extended period of time, and then, just as the teacher/tutor is ready to give up, the learner demonstrates a dramatic surge and is, well,

"suddenly reading." This phenomenon is described in the Perception-Recognition-Insight model thusly:

I. PERIOD OF PERCEPTION AND RECOGNITION

A. The gradual collection of experiences that are relevant to the learner's understanding of the patterns and rhythms of the language.

B. The growing awareness of patterns:

1. He perceives that there <u>are</u> identifiable, repetitive patterns.
2. He begins to <u>recognize</u> some of these patterns.
3. He begins to <u>generalize</u> from these specific patterns.

II. PERIOD OF INSIGHT AND RAPID GROWTH

A. The learner makes the leap from a series of "Mmmm...hmmm" experiences to "Aha!" experiences.

B. He has now collected all the experiences necessary to allow the Reader archetype to break through to consciousness and he is "suddenly reading."

Two major implications derive from this model: (1) the learner is the Sun of the Reading universe, and experiences and information revolve around <u>him</u>, and (2) reading will emerge quite naturally if we

allow the inexorable forces of perception, recognition, and insight to operate freely in a language-rich environment, and where information is provided "on-demand;" that is, when the learner identifies what he needs to know (i.e. what experiences and information are appropriate to the emergence of the Reader archetype in that individual.)

4. Human beings are not blank slates that you write reading on, or, "Oz never did give nothin' to the Tin Man, that he didn't. . . already have. . ." (5)

Yes, the nature vs. nurture refrain once again. While some teach as if human beings are blank slates to be written upon, others try to bring learning out, believing that human beings possess certain innate potentialities, embroidered, as it were, on their genes. In an earlier articles, "Language Archetypes: A Jungian Perspective on Reading Beavhior" (6) I proposed an extension of Carl Jung's theory of "archetypes" (7) and hypothesized that four "language archetypes" could be included in Jung's "collective unconscious:" The Listener, The Speaker, The Reader, and The Writer, and I further suggested that, similar to Jung's archetypes, these "language archetypes" are realized, i.e. brought into the realm of consciousness as a result of exposure to appropriate experiences. In Jungian terms these archetypes are virtual images, or latent, innate potentialities that exist in the "collective

unconscious" of all human beings, and they break through to consciousness when the archetype, serving as a magnetic nucleus, attracts sufficient relevant experiences to form a complex. Then, when this archetype-centered complex gathers sufficient energy, the archetype, in this case The Reader, breaks through into consciousness and the person appears to be "suddently reading."

This apparently sudden emergence of The Reader archetype is congruent with the Perception-Recognition-Insight Curve theory, as both describe a latent period of seeming inactivity, during which experiences are collecting, and is followed by the dramatic emergence of The Reader. The "motion" of teaching reading, i.e. direct instruction, then becomes nearly irrelevant to the emergence of reading behavior, since the real "action" of learning to read occurs in the unconscious. It would follow then that our task is to cease jamming information into learners in a direct, linear fashion, and to rather begin to provide a language-rich environment that offers the unconscious mind the opportunity to be about its business of collecting experiences relevant to the emergence of The Reader archetype in that individual.

Under the Old Paradigm we were all too anxious to put Reading into people using packaged Reading curricula (Reading programs, kits, modules, etc.), while under the New Paradigm we will let the individual's experiences become the materials for learning to read, and we will be

putting our energies into helping The Reader come out.

But here the Voice of The Classroom Teacher asks The-Egghead-in-The-Ivory-Tower: "But how does that theory work in the 'real world' ?" The practical applications of this New Paradigm will include the following instructions for teachers:

- Don't be the only teacher in the room. Deputize anyone in the room who knows more than someone else, and train them to be helpful. And do not stand in front of the room and teach Reading lessons, i.e. "The Sermon-on-The-Mount" approach. Move around the room and teach by answering questions; help the helper to help better; keep feeding materials to the environment that promote reading behavior.

- Once you've tossed out the canned published junk, create a language-rich environment by providing letter and word cubes, Scrabble games, resource and reference books, story books, any reading materials of interest to individuals.

- Even prior to formal reading, teach the fundamentals: (1) How to distinguish the most important from the

less important, (2) How to frame and solve problems, (3) How to find information, and (4) How to adjust to change. Again, remember, these fundamentals can be taught to "non-readers" and they will promote the learning-to-read process. (And who knows what else?)

- Involve parents, roommates, lovers, friends in the process, but don't let them "teach" Reading lessons to the learning-reader, because we know that reading ability and self-image are highly correlated and it would be disastrous to embarrass a person. But do suggest that these persons at home read to the learner; and not from something that they think is "good for him," but only reading materials chosen by the learner. Be sure to instruct these home helpers to avoid playing teacher by stopping to ask comprehension questions; this only interrupts the flow and continuity, and the meaning. Encourage the helpers to answer questions, and to discuss what was read at the end of the selection. Reading to people has been greatly under-rated as a contributory factor in the reading process, but it is vitally important, as it brings to the reader's consciousness latent knowledge of the patterns of the language,

which he will use when he tries to anticipate and predict language patterns and meaning when reading.

Also, if you believe the helper is sensitive enough to handle it, train him to "take dictation;" that is, employ the Language-Experience approach by writing down the meaning that the person expresses verbally, and then helping him to read it back.

5. Our approach to reading has been backwards: we've been starting with extrinsic meanings in print and trying to make the learner turn it into speech, when we should be starting with intrinsic meanings in speech and turning them into print.

This is commonly referred to as the "Language-Experience approach" (8) and, with all due respect to the experts in the field, I do not believe that anyone has defined it more eloquently than a 10-year-old tutee of mine who, after reading back a story that he dictated to me, said: "Hey, you took what I said and turned it into reading!" It really should come as no surprise to us that this simple approach is far more successful than all the packaged stuff from publishers because:

- it helps the learner to realize the relationships between meaning represented verbally and meaning represented in print.

- it does not start with extrinsic meanings (printed materials that could, will or should have meaning to him), but rather with intrinsic meanings: the personally perceived, idiosyncratic, egocentric experiences of the individual learner.

- it begins with meaningful material concerning the subject that is of the most interest to the learner: himself.

- it allows the learning-reader to "do" reading in the same manner that fluent readers "do" it.

* * *

Although this New Paradigm for Reading will likely manifest itself by means of gradual infiltration, and not in the fashion of an overnight revolution, its' scope will nonetheless be revolutionary. The guiding principle of this New Paradigm was best expressed by Malcolm Douglass who emphasizes that we must stop trying to "invoke" reading, and begin rather to "evoke" reading behavior. (9)

It is difficult to predict the moment when the transformation to the New Paradigm will be complete. But make no mistake; once

sufficient data about the brain, the language, and the interactions between them has been collected and once this data has been incorporated during a period of perception, recognition, and insight, this New Paradigm for Reading, like reading behavior itself, will inexorably emerge.

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